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Gaming-Playing on Social Media: Using the Psychoanalytic Concept of 'Playing' to Theorize User Labour on Facebook

Abstract: Political economists have argued that user activity on corporate social media is regarded as labour that appears playful and fun but is exploited and sold to advertisers for profit maximization. This article begins with the working assumption that such user labour on social media constitutes a form of playing. It is theorized through a psychoanalytic perspective on the term as developed by D. W. Winnicott and André Green. The notion of gaming-playing is put forward to account for set interface structures on Facebook that resemble a game as well as free-flowing dimensions more akin to playing. Some user discourses on Facebook are analysed through this prism. A psychoanalytic conceptualisation of user labour as playing allows one to analyse both positive discourses that emphasise Facebook as a space for creativity, exploration and the unknown, as well as negative discourses that critique the platform with regards to lacking privacy controls or data ownership. Both discourses are conducted in a playful manner that creatively utilise a sense of user agency in relation to others and Facebook itself, but often remain without consequences.

Keywords: Playing, gaming, labour, psychoanalysis, D.W. Winnicott, social media

1. Introduction

Scholars have put forward the argument that users on corporate social media work by generating content that is sold to advertisers without receiving remuneration (Comor, 2010; Andrejevic, 2011, 2014; Fuchs, 2012; Fisher, 2012; Fuchs and Sevignani, 2013; Sevignani 2013; Krüger and Johanssen, 2014; Fisher, 2015; Jarrett, 2015). This form of unpaid work that is about generating content occurs, it is alleged, in a playful manner that is generally considered being fun or light activity and may not be regarded as or equated with hard or serious work (Kücklich, 2005). 'It is more true to assert that play, through its function under the sign of consumerism, has itself become a form of work.' (Dovey and Kennedy 2006, p. 19). Critical theorists argue that such activity actually constitutes a form of free labour (Terranova, 2000) that is mostly hidden as users experience a platform such as Facebook as a functioning platform that they can make use of. The use value overshadows the exchange value (Fuchs and Sevignani, 2013).

> Online activity creates content, social networks and relations, location data, browsing data, data about likes and preferences, etc. This online activity is fun and work at the same time – play labour. Play labour (playbour) creates a data commodity that is sold to advertising clients as a commodity. Fuchs and Sevignani 2013, p. 237

Taking this conceptualization of labour disguised as playing, or playbour as a starting point, I am interested in theorizing it further through exploration of psychoanalytic accounts of playing. While the term 'playful' can be found in scholarly discussions of social media, few have considered this idea in more detail explicitly through the term 'playing' (Lingiardi 2008; Wilson, 2011; Balick, 2014; Hills, 2014). In his study on fake Twitter profiles of politicians, Wilson has argued that 'open-ended playful phenomena emerging from cultures of social and mobile media use might be fruitfully examined by combining some of the sources of contemporary fan studies, game studies and performance studies' (Wilson, 2011, p. 458). This articles follows such a call for multi-disciplinarily albeit in a different direction. One aim of this article is to initiate a conversation between psychoanalytic theorizations of playing and social media research as well as to situate those in relation to literature on gaming. To do so, I draw on how playing was conceptualised by the British psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott (2002) and elaborated on by the French psychoanalyst André Green (2005). Playing has been of increasing interest in different academic fields such as game studies for example (Dovey and Kennedy, 2006) where it is often used in conjuncture with the term *gaming*. Gamification researchers have argued that characteristics of gaming and being playful are increasingly penetrating different spheres of life (e.g. Wark 2007, Frissen et al 2015, Lupton and Thomas, 2015). Overall, little attention has been given to the play element and to playfulness in settings that may not be conceived of as ludic from the outset. Furthermore, a psychoanalytic perspective on playing may allow one to analyse positive, empathic, loving as well negative, destructive forms of play as they occur on social networking sites. While 'play' has often been conceptualised positively as a life-affirming and creative process, there may be another dimension to play that points to aggression and alienation (Lund, 2014, p. 741). This may be particularly evident when it comes to negative user experiences on social media, as I outline in this article in more detail. 'What is lacking is a deeper investigation into how and why users have negative experiences on Facebook', Fox and Moreland (2015, p. 169) note. This article makes a contribution to theorizing such user experiences as well as positive ones by metaphorically regarding them as forms of play that are situated within relations of user exploitation (Fuchs, 2014).

Generally, this article then aims to theorise the relationship between Facebook and its users as it is shown across the social networking site as being situated along an axis of *playing* and *gaming*. The following research question guided the research: how do users express their opinion on and experience of using Facebook on the social networking site? I was interested if such discursive expressions would refer to negative experiences in relation to privacy, data ownership, advertising, work, lack of control or any other problems more generally but also if there were positive aspects about the social networking site (its use value in that sense) that users would articulate. In other words, if the dialectics of work and play could be identified in user discourses on the platform itself.

Specifically, exemplary Facebook posts were obtained from two places between 01 September and 31 October 2016. Publicly accessible user posts that were gathered through using the search function and entering the term '#facebook', as well

as posts on the official Facebook page Facebook and Privacy (https://www.facebook.com/fbprivacy/). The page is used by Facebook administrators to post about policy changes, updates to terms of use and general changes to the website. It is essentially an avenue where parts of the rules of Facebook are laid down, changed and publicised. Many users respond and articulate criticism with regards to privacy, identity theft, or general problems they face. In the past, Facebook administrators have also responded to selected questions from users about privacy issues. The focus for data collection was placed on those two particular avenues (the use of the term #facebook and the official Facebook and Privacy page) because it was hoped that they would allow for user data to be accessible which were about the value and critique of Facebook. This sampling mechanism constitutes a potential limitation as it limited the potential data to particular instances. Future research could aim to make use of a broader sampling technique which could obtain posts from a variety of places on the platform. While the data is publicly available, the names of the users are not reproduced in the study. Many hundred posts were read and 27 were selected to form a qualitative basis of the research. A small sample was chosen in order to conduct an in-depth qualitative analysis that can lead to theorizing a particular (i.e. playful) relationship between Facebook and its users. Posts were selected that point to the diverse nature of discussion that takes place in relation to and about Facebook on the platform. Both single posts (without comments) and discussion posts where other users had replied to a user post were selected. User names were labelled numerically and an additional number was added if another user had posted a reply (e.g. 'User 1.1.' replied to 'User 1'). The posts were mostly analysed as a whole in order to explore their overall tone rather than dividing them into fragments using a detailed coding procedure. The research question shaped the selection of the Facebook posts and on reading them, different categories were created inductively. The data were analysed drawing on psychoanalytic conceptions of playing. While a larger sample may have been beneficial, the interdisciplinary nature of this article allows for limited discussion and it was therefore decided to give space to theorizing discursive dynamics in detail.

2. Conceptualising Playing and Gaming

Lund (2014) has provided a useful and general definition of playing in opposition to more structured gaming:

> Play is not well planned but capricious, spontaneous, social responsive and not uniformly produced. I would therefore say that play can be productive, very similar to work in its effects, but it is also something else and more immediate. Humans indeed have a need to play, but the reason for playing is not primarily and consciously to produce a use value that satisfies a consciously felt need; play is not thought of in an instrumental way. Lund, 2014, p. 741

For the purpose of this article, play is used in the metaphorical sense to denote a particular experience of engaging with Facebook that is a free flowing, spontaneous,

less bounded form of activity that is creative and constructs a particular reality. Yet this activity is also a form of work as it creates and contributes to value.

Sigmund Freud (1974) famously discussed playing in his example of the *fort – da* game he witnessed his grandson play. The throwing away and retrieving of a piece of cotton wool that symbolised a re-enactment of the mother's comings and goings. For Freud, playing is largely connected to pleasure and the (unconscious) mastery over feelings of loss, subordination or anxiety through play.

The British psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott (2002) wished to further advance the notion of playing. For him, playing is a creative process that traverses the inner and outer world, the realms of fantasy and reality, of a subject. For Winnicott, playing and its occurrence are strongly related to 'transitional objects', such as blankets or teddy bears that the baby begins to play with at a certain point in time in their first year. The transitional object is, crucially, both a found object (or a given object to the baby or infant) that is an *object* as such perceivable by the parents (i.e. the teddy bear), but also a *subjectively* created and animated object by the child. The child makes the object do things and come alive. The parents learn to understand that the object has a value for the child and make sure it is within reach.

> This is particularly important for the child when the mother is absent or there is a feeling of loneliness or an anxiety of some kind. The transitional object helps the infant cope with feelings of loss. Winnicott, 2002, p. 12

A related concept that needs mentioning here is that of the 'potential space' (p. 138). Winnicott means by the term a space between baby and her environment that is facilitated by the mother when she plays with the baby (p. 138). It gives rise to creativity and trust and describes the baby's journey from total dependence on the mother to 'a degree of confidence' (p. 146) in herself as a separate being and in the mother as reliable and responsive to needs. The baby may fill this space by playing with the mother or in her presence. 'The thing about playing is always the precariousness of the interplay of personal psychic reality and the experience of control of actual objects.' (Winnicott, 2002, p. 64), Winnicott notes. Drawing on Winnicott, André Green has defined play as follows:

> Play is a manifestation of the mind that I understand as being the result of undoing the pieces belonging to reality, in order to recombine them and create a potential existence. Green, 2005, p. 21

In that sense there is always something utopian and creative about playing that we may also find on Facebook in the form of playful activity. Playing designates an activity that uses and anticipates a future state of being.

Playing is one of the first activities of any human being that ultimately enables culture and phenomena like artworks, games and leisure activities to exist (see also Huizinga 1955 for a similar argument). In playing with e.g. a teddy bear, the infant achieves a feeling of omnipotence and puts her omnipotence into action by making the object 'do' as she wishes. In playing, the infant uses something that was *de-facto*

provided (a physical object) and creates and animates it at the same time. This description may be akin to social media use as users are given a platform that they can subjectively shape, animate and use but only to a limited degree. Using Facebook may from the outset be thus conceptualised metaphorically as a pleasurable, joyous, reassuring and secure activity within fixed boundaries and rules that is similar to playing, but, as I shall go on to argue, is also intersected by gaming. Any form of playing, be it alone or with others, may or may not involve some set of rules or agreed upon structures that the players follow. In contrast, gaming may follow a set of rules that are more binding and rigid. If the game has not been invented by them, players in many cases draw on set rules that they know, have internalized and agreed on e.g. in a game of Chess (Wark, 2007; Lund, 2014). In contrast to gaming, playing is more fluid and less bound to rules. While the terms 'game' and 'play' have sometimes been used interchangeably (e.g. by Huizinga 1955 or Winnicott himself), it is useful to differentiate between them. Gaming is more goal-oriented than playing as specific goals need to be achieved (e.g. in reaching another level in computer games). Lund maintains that 'in playing it is the activity itself which is the goal' (Lund, 2014, p. 766) whereas in gaming rules are more fixed and in many cases impossible to break or re-define during the game itself. 'The movement which is play has no goal which brings it to an end; rather it renews itself in constant repetition.' (Gadamer, 1981, p. 93). Playing is thus an act of creativity but still bound within set structures, such as the use of specified objects or ideas, that are followed by the player(s). It becomes clear that there is some tension between the categories of gaming and playing. Lund (2014) has defined playing as a transhistorical and universal activity that all humans share:

> Humans indeed have a need to play, but the reason for playing is not primarily and consciously to produce a use value that satisfies a consciously felt need; play is not thought of in an instrumental way. You can play just for the fun of it, as well as a child un-consciously can work his/her way through a problematic experience by play. And is it not true that play also, for various reasons, can be destructive in relation to use values? Lund 2014, 741

We can see some elements of Winnicott's definition of playing in the above quote. Playing, like all subjective processes, is thus partly shaped by unconscious processes. What distinguishes the Freudian and Winnicottian conceptualisations of playing from ones based in the social sciences or philosophy more generally is that playing is (unconsciously) used as a mechanism of *working-through*, of playing with and re-enacting anxious or difficult states in order to achieve mastery over them (Winnicott 2002). I return to this notion later on in the article.

Gaming, on the other hand, is historical and culturally specific in so far as different games are created and played in different cultures. Juul (2005) has described the joy of gaming as engaging with challenges. While there are of course many different games that feature different sets of rules, most games are competitive in nature – similarly to capitalism. 'Gaming, with its focus on contest, shares the same mentality as capitalism and has the potential of producing a competitive labour force for the

capitalist production process.' (Lund 2014, 764). Lund maintains a crucial distinction between play and game which is one of cooperation and competition. While play is often explorative and cooperative, games are competitive and produce a winner as a result of fixed rules (Schwartzman 1978).

Playing, Gaming and Working on Social Media
Having discussed differences and similarities between game and play, I would like to take it as a working assumption that users conduct a form of gaming-playing (as well as working) on corporate social media, such as Facebook for example. *Any* user activity on Facebook may be seen as a way to 'manage tensions between inner and outer worlds' (Hills, 2002, p. 74). From a psychoanalytic perspective, playing is understood as something that in its 'apparent fixity and repetition' (p. 79) may mirror users' social media use. It is marked by ritualistic, performative and repetitive patterns that I will return to throughout this paper in more detail. What happens if we think of user activities on social media as forms of gaming-playing that are simultaneously value-creating labour? This notion is implicit in the concepts of 'playbour' (Kücklich 2005) and free labour (Terranova 2000) which have been discussed in the digital labour debate, but may be rendered more complex through further theorisation (see also Lund 2014, 2015). It also allows us to think of user activity as *both* fulfilling and exploitative, as being about use and exchange values (Terranova 2000; Jarrett 2015). This tension between play, game and work may enable an open theorization rather than one that is closed down through emphasising exploitation, alienation, or use values and self-fulfilment only. Through the notion of gaming-playing, a sense of user agency that transgresses as well as conforms to set rules is put forward.

Gaming-Playing by the Rules
On Facebook, users are provided with a framework (the website or app and the features) that they can use creatively and play with. From the outset, Facebook may be more about gaming rather than playing, but I maintain that there are features of the social networking site that designate and enable playing elements as well. Facebook is first of all an interface with various functions that can be used by the users, such as posting on someone's profile wall, posting on the timeline, uploading photos, joining groups and so on. These fundamental features of the site cannot be altered and we could argue that users can actually do very little but to follow the rules of the game. In this and the next sections of the article, I will discuss some exemplary user posts that may point to different forms of gaming-playing labour.

> User 3: 'Thank you soo much for all the Birthday love friends and family ☺ 🎂 #lovefacebook lol'

> User 4: 'A big Thank You for 500 likes on our FB page too! Your following is greatly valued!! #lovefacebook #socialmedia #stayingconnected #likeus […]'

The two quotes that are about thanking others for congratulating the user on their birthday and for liking a Facebook page, show that playing is of course often relational and done by more than one human being. The users thank other Facebook users who, in a sense, have followed the rules laid down by both social conventions (one congratulates someone on their birthday) and by Facebook through reminding them that it is another user's birthday. It is Facebook that tells us that we should congratulate another user, or that we can like a page. These rules have been established by the platform and we can either follow them, or not. Not following them may come at a cost and at an expense of social relationships however. Both posts also make use of the #lovefacebook hashtag and in a sense thank the SNS for providing the rules and playing field that makes these interactions possible. Additionally, such posts show a form of competitive discourse that stresses the numbers of followers (in the second example) and the many friends who wished the user a happy birthday. There may be an unconscious dimension to the manifestations of such posts that designate the users as wanting to be the winners, as having the most likes, the most birthday wishes and the subsequent need to *disclose* this to the other users so that it can be further acknowledged through likes, comments or shares. This may be similarly to the celebratory and jubilant outbursts by the winner when a game has come to an end. The acts of posting a birthday message or liking a particular page are in themselves similar to work in so far as there is a need for repetitively executing them which is suggested by Facebook in order to conform to the rules. This is also enforced through the basic features of Facebook that remind users (through the bell icon on the app, or the globe icon on the website) that something new has happened in their absence that needs attention through responding by commenting or liking for example.

> User 5: 'Uhhhhhh my pictures were seen by thousands of people! What an amazing thing... thank you all!'

A page for an after school club notes:

> User 6: 'Wowsers! We now have 165 likes!! Welcome to everyone, we hope you enjoy our updates. It's fab that so many people are interested in what we do! […] #lovefacebook'

The posts can be read as manifestations that the rules are followed and Facebook's inherent logic is reproduced: to produce as much content as possible and to generate unique connections between many individuals in order for them to be monetised. In that sense, users are forced to play by the rules that Facebook has laid down. There is fairly little agency present in the users' actions. They follow specific rules established by Facebook.

Gaming-Playing in the Potential Space
However, at the same time Facebook may be perceived as an enabling structure that holds the players in place in a safe environment that enables gaming-playing where

the emphasis is more on the 'playing' rather than the 'gaming'. While Facebook's rigid functionality may effectively limit what users can do on the site and its demands to share data may constitute a set of rules, there is still some space that can be creatively shaped within such structures.

> User 1: 'When you connect with the right person from far away, it's exciting! #LoveFacebook.'

> User 2: 'Re-connected w/Cynthia! She helped me when I started my company 12yrs ago!'

With regards to these posts, we may describe them as forms of gaming-playing and Facebook as similar to the potential space between mother / caregiver and baby. The users / baby do not fully know what is going to happen during the play, there is always a sense of the unknown and curiosity of what is to come. We can read the first two quotes as a description of engaging with the potential space of Facebook whereby the users suddenly connected with old friends and this has resulted in pleasurable feelings and feelings of love towards Facebook for facilitating such connections. Playing may thus be seen here as forms of online activity in an 'intermediary space between the visible and invisible, between the mysterious and the evident, between the playful and the serious' (Schacht, 1999, p. 180, cited in Nicolò, 2015, p. 24).

Such posts may be regarded as playful expressions that point to relationality (they address other users) and affirm the poster's subjectivity by producing content that is for everyone to see and acknowledge. Social media may be regarded here as an opportunity for being held in a secure environment that facilitates free-flowing, playful modes of expression which assure the user of a secure sense of self. It is primarily a structured interface that always stays the same and enables a sense of being held to emerge in the users. This sense of security then enables endless possibilities for users to playfully shape their subjectivities and interact with others on the platform. This is made possible while they, mostly unconsciously, know that Facebook is going to be there and not change its design, functionality or any other aspects in a drastic manner that may disrupt the users' mode of experience. In any virtual environment, and in social media in particular, there is thus a dialectics of power and feelings of omnipotence as well as vulnerability and being acted upon by others (other users, social media administrators and so on).

Returning to the above user posts, one can posit that they not only express a love for Facebook for being there, almost like a maternal figure or caregiver, but they are also discursive expressions of connections towards an other or others. Regarding certain user discourses as forms of playing, may point to their self-affirming nature. As has been argued by many scholars, posting content on social media primarily contributes to the user's self-assurance and feelings of recognition by others. In posting content, users are heard, seen and acknowledged as human beings by others (Lovink 2011, p. 53; boyd 2012, p. 73; Murthy 2013, p. 28; Hills 2014, p. 188). From the posts alone, it is not clear who those others are or who the posts are

directed at. What matters is that the users make use of the relational dynamics of Facebook that allow for posts to show up on newsfeeds and be read and commented on by others. As Turkle (2011) and Balick (2014) argue, such forms of communication are expressions of both a desire to be seen by the other and a desire of omnipotence: to create and master one's own subjectivity online that is recognised by others. Social media may thus be perceived as a safe space similar to the Winnicottian potential space in which subjectivities can be created, played with and altered in relation to both an existing structure (the SNS) and other users. This is largely possible because it is, firstly, facilitated and enabled by a site such as Facebook, and, secondly, because the users (un)consciously create narratives (through discursive posts and other content) that represent themselves online. Such forms of playful representation are enforced and recognised through user interaction through standardised rules that are more akin to gaming rather than playing (such as liking, 'emojiing', sharing, or commenting). We may begin to see how the relationship between a user, Facebook and other users may constitute a potential space online in which possibilities for creative encounters are endless and much is possible within a set framework. Going back to André Green's definition of play as an activity that creates 'a potential existence' (Green, 2005, p. 21), the posts discussed above also point to future potentialities and the unknown (more pictures may be seen, a page may receive even more likes, more old friends may be discovered and so on). The following posts also implicitly point to the future:

> User 8: 'What a beautiful morning! Have a wonderful day ladies, let's show this world how fabulous we are...
> #facebook #lovefacebook #facebookshoutout'
>
> User 9: '#LoveFacebook for bringing us together and learning how to support each other more!X'

The posts express a curiosity, affirmation and emphasise the supportive qualities that are enabled through Facebook's relational structures that enable conversations. The two users above are creating a potential existence through discourses that are about being fabulous, anticipation of the unknown, relationality and mutual support. New realities are created through discourses that anticipate them. Seen in a positive light, the psychic function of Facebook and its appeal to users may in those cases be that of a facilitator of a potential space.

The psychoanalyst Aaron Balick concludes that social networking sites are largely 'supportive of positive relational interdependence' (p. 122). However, such possibilities of relationality may create tensions between 'the subject and object, omnipotence and limit' (Balick, 2014, p. 112) online. Users may be free to articulate whatever they wish to but others can respond in hateful or destructive ways.

Destructive Gaming-Playing
Wanting to Change the Rules

There may be other specific examples of gaming-playing as I discuss in this section that are in contrast to the overtly positive theorizations of playing that Winnicott (2002) discusses but also Matt Hills (2002, 2014) and Aaron Balick (2014) have put forward with regards to media. While play, as Winnicott (2002) defined it, is about creative processes that traverse the inner and outer world, fantasy and reality, he did not consider destructive playing or what André Green referred to as 'dirty playing' (Green, 2005, p. 2). For Green, playing frequently takes on negative and destructive characteristics. Such destructive practices may seek to harm or symbolically destroy the other and yet they are performed in a playful manner, implying that the performed actions carry no 'real' consequences. I now aim to discuss exemplary Facebook posts that may point to dirty and destructive ways of playing within the set rules of the Facebook game. While such accounts may be considered as forms of destructive playing, users may still – perhaps especially – gain pleasure from them.

> User 10: 'I've just done a Facebook survey that gives a totally false impression of my preferences. It was about 'the kind of items you want to see on your newsfeed'. We were offered two options, but could choose to say 'can't decide'. Now, I didn't want to say I positively wanted anything on offer, so I could only click 'can't decide'. But that's not true. My real choice was 'Neither', but Facebook didn't allow for that.
> Facebook also didn't allow for 'only items from friends; I don't want Facebook to intrude, and I sure as heck don't want adverts.
> Jeez, Facebook, when will you stop exercising restricting controls on your supposedly honest surveys? Isn't it enough that we're using your site? Back off.'

> User 10.1: 'Back on'

Another user posted on the Facebook and Privacy page:

> User 11: 'The 1 thing that remains the same: you don't have to have a Facebook account if you don't want one (or don't enjoy using it). Facebook has always given you, the user, the power to close/deactivate your account at any time. Great isn't it?
> I love Facebook'

> User 11.1: 'YEACH ! . Great! . mean, you have a great MOUTH !!!'

> User 11.2: 'big mouth u r'

The first post is an instance where the user complains about certain rules that Facebook has set. Whereas Facebook seems to have asked the user to fill in a survey about newsfeed preferences – this could actually be seen as an invitation to have a say and possibly influence the rules (i.e. coding and algorithmic procedures that govern the site). However, the user seems to take issue with the item

construction of the survey and they felt unable to record their views correctly. Finally, the user accuses Facebook of 'exercising restricting controls'.

With regards to the replies to those two posts, one may regard the other users' responses as particularly playful and one could even classify them as instances of trolling or flaming perhaps. In both cases, the replies may be seen as attempts of other users to destroy or undermine someone else's discourse. The two users who replied to the favourable Facebook post can be seen insulting the user and telling them they have 'a big mouth'. The other reply in the first posting is a simple, playful 'back on' to the passionately and slightly aggressive 'back off' from the other poster. We may interpret the 'back on' as a similar means of owning the discourse whereby users in online discussions want to have the last word, as well as a resuming statement that makes the game continue. It is literally (still) back on because, at the time of writing this article, both users were still play-gaming on the platform and had not left Facebook for example. This reply almost feels like a discursive playing with a ball whereby the ball is passed back to the other user who did not respond to the 'back on' comment. The thread has come to an end and the last reply is the 'back on'.

The Facebook and Privacy page is used here by some users as a playing field where they can freely perform destructive moves within the site. The two replies that accuse the user of having a big mouth may be seen as analogous to unfair or rule breaking practices within a play, essentially an unfair act of playing. Both users seemingly could not accept that another user has broken an implicit affective atmosphere of the threads on the page that are mostly negative in nature. The user has actually stood up for Facebook and praised it. This goes against the dominant narrative and two users are quick to shut down the post with their comments. These comments are made possible through the ability to post a reply but they are also testimonies of the highly ritualised and performative (playful) culture of online flaming and trolling as it occurs on so many discursive spaces across the web. The majority of the comments on the Facebook and Privacy page are characterised by a negative affective atmosphere. Users complain and criticize Facebook for many different reasons. User 11 seems to have unwittingly disrupted such an atmosphere with a positive post and other users are quick shut down the discussion through forms of symbolic violence.

A further conversation that attests to more negative user experiences that specifically discuss Facebook's reporting feature is reproduced below.

User 12: 'When something is reported nothing is done , things just sit in 'support' as being reviewed never being done this has gone on now a year'

User 12.1: 'My reports do get reviewed but Rarely is anthing done about them! Usually it says 'This does not violate our Community Standards.' Well, I Really think they ought to re~do their Freaking Community Standards!!!!!!!! It's gotten to the point where I feel like WTH should I even report something if Nothing is going to be done????!!!! & I've told them that!!!!!!!!'

User 12.2: 'Right!'

The above discussion could be summarised as an impression of users that Facebook breaks its own rules. Both users take issue with the reporting feature and Facebook's lack of response to it. The users' discourse may be analogous to someone who complains of a game in which the rules are non-transparent or changed by a higher power mid-way through the game. The third reply 'right' is very affirmative and many replies of such a nature can be found on the page. The comments stage a breakdown of relations between the users and Facebook. Facebook is not responding, so why should the users take any action anymore? Feelings of alienation and powerlessness may be at stake here but we may interpret them as being rendered pleasurable through posting on the Facebook page. Users write of their own experience and then demand that something must change for them, rather than for everyone on the platform. These experiences can find an outlet and a space where they are seen and possibly recognised by others. This may add a sense of strange pleasure to the users who post about their own experiences because it adds an importance and sense of entitlement for them. Additionally, a mutual affirmation amongst the users may create a sense that they are united against higher powers who misrecognise or ignore their wishes and demands. Through practices such as liking (and thereby 'upvoting') and affirmative replies, the users form a kind of resistant multitude which supports each other. This may be further explored through another set of posts that specifically address Facebook's relations of production.

Targeted Advertising
Some users can also be seen mentioning Facebook's business model that – as discussed at the beginning – depends on user data extraction which is sold to advertisers.

User 13: 'You have blocked my account for some reason - I have received no explanation at all. It's been 36 hours now, and although OTHERS can post anything they wish on my profile, you are blocking nearly everything external. No notice, no reason why - totally unfair! When will this be fixed? When will you at least tell me what's going on? When will be more responsive to your users and not just to the advertisers?'

A different thread touches on similar issues:

User 14: 'How come if i happen to look at say a handbag site, my Facebook wall shows advertisements for handbags. How can i make my google history unaccessible by Facebook Security?'

User 14.1: 'Fb collects all information even if you don't own an account, the minute you read a comment from FB etc they store a cookie on your device and then advertising companies pay them to put up their add based on what you have browsed'

User 14.2: 'Belgium has 'just sued' FB for unlawful collection of information in regard to the same matter'

User 14.3: 'You can't escape lol :P'

User 14.4: 'Use Adblock Plus and no more ads!'

The users in this exchange seem to display a clear knowledge of Facebook's targeted advertising mechanisms that are used to sell user data as a data commodity to advertisers. It seems they are aware of their own playbour activities. Again, we may detect a kind of playful irony here in so far as users are criticizing Facebook's exploitative practices on the SNS itself, on an official page, quasi in front of Facebook administrators. These acts are playful in so far as they remain without any consequences for Facebook, for the users, or for the Facebook-user relation. The users have stayed on Facebook and seem to have put up with their exploitation. In particular the statement 'You can't escape lol :P' seems to carry an element of a playful joke but also a sense of seriousness at the same time. There is no real alternative to corporate social media (yet). Additionally, the above posts suggest that some users are very aware of the underlying economic framework and their data being sold to advertising clients but they have not or could not have done anything about such exploitative dynamics. Their critique may have been taken up, and ultimately muted, by Facebook through the Facebook and Privacy page. The page promises a level of fair play and transparency through Facebook administrators who post about privacy issues and users who can reply or create their own postings. While it is not entirely clear what the first user has experienced (a blocked profile possibly), they clearly articulate a sense of feeling betrayed by Facebook. Instead of being responsive to and feeling responsible for its users, the platform is primarily accountable to advertisers who guarantee its survival by paying for advertising space.

User 14.1 appears to show a level of technical knowledge as far as Facebook's use of cookies and data mining are concerned. They express the desire to subvert Facebook's surveillance mechanisms in order not to receive targeted advertising based on browsing behaviour. These posts point to an unequal Facebook-user relation whereby users are denied sufficient agency and rights when it comes to the control of their data that is aggregated and extracted online.

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to explore Facebook posts as forms of content generated through user labour. I drew on political-economic scholarship that situates Facebook user activity as digital labour which is exploited for profit maximization. Such user labour was situated as playful, fun and appearing somewhat less serious while at the same time being conducted for free and sold on as data commodities. I then sought to further conceptualise this form of playful labour through the psychoanalytic notion of 'playing' as developed by D. W. Winnicott (2002) and elaborated on by André

Green (2005). Rather than only focussing on discourse that shows an awareness of user exploitation and lack of data control and ownership, I was also interested in seeing Facebook dialectically as a platform that may enable both feelings of frustration and critique as well as love and relationality to co-exist. The prism of gaming-playing enables a view on such discourses that takes account of both sides of the spectrum. I began my analysis with posts that described Facebook in a positive, loving manner and emphasised its useful and enabling features. The user posts analysed in that section describe Facebook similar to a maternal caregiver who enables a space of exploration, creativity, freedom and the unknown to come into being while at the same time guaranteeing safe boundaries and mechanisms that maintain the space. Regarding Facebook as such a 'potential space' which enables transitional phenomena allows one to see the conscious and unconscious significance of social media in the everyday lives of users and how their subjectivities are shaped through it.

The other posts were labelled as forms of destructive playing. Those posts seek to shatter the Facebook-user relation through comments that essentially designate a disagreement with the rules, set up by Facebook, and at the same time keep on gaming-playing because these posts further contribute to maintaining Facebook's existence and relations of production. In that way, certain user activity on Facebook may be conceptualised as playing within specified rules that is about the creation of a fantasy of agency that users have when they inform Facebook of problems they encountered and what they are going to do about them, or what should be done about them. Facebook has thus created a platform where users can vent their anger that is similar to a playing field with existing rules and boundaries and no consequences that reach beyond the act of playing itself within the field (Lovink, 2011). It is questionable if users have really followed up on their posts. Instead, they are playing amongst each other, frequently commenting on each other's posts about the negative qualities of Facebook and, yet, they seem to remain on the social networking site. Such acts of playing may be very important in so far as they enable users to maintain fantasies of agency and power because they have actually informed Facebook what their dissatisfactions or problems are, yet it may be assumed that the same users know that very little will happen in reality. We may posit that once they have played their part on the page, they can safely return to the other pages and functions of Facebook again. Rather than dismissing such posts as pathological or incoherent, I wish to argue that they may be of value because they signify a space in which users may make sense of the power structures on Facebook that are marked by invisibility, inequality, commodification and exploitation. This sense-making, however, occurs in a playful manner and constitutes an act of gaming-playing in so far as it occurs within existing boundaries and is without consequences. Users play with a sense of agency through narratives and have empowered themselves on a playing field where they are given a space and a voice to articulate their thoughts on Facebook and privacy issues in particular. This form of gaming-playing is highly performative and ritualistic. It is brought into existence by Facebook through encouraging users to post about privacy issues but it is the users themselves

who have given the page a ritualistic and performative feel because endless posts touch on similar things.

In treating all user activities as forms of gaming-playing, a tension opens up that is situated at the nexus of working – playing – gaming. Lund (2014, 2015) has argued that the activities of working and playing are fundamentally in opposition to each other. They are incompatible. Working constitutes 'a quantitative instrumentality', while playing makes for a 'qualitative non-instrumentality' (Lund 2015, 67). Working involves producing quantified goods during labour time, while playing is free and without boundaries. However, my conceptualisation of Facebook user labour as gaming-playing shows that those two categories are not in opposition on Facebook. It points to the tension and potential antagonism that users are in. They are able to exercise a form of agency (in playing) within set rules of the game but it ultimately constitutes a form of work.

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